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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

Chair's summary

1. On 14 and 15 March 2018, in a series of interactive dialogues, the Commission on the Status of Women evaluated progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on the priority theme of its forty-seventh session, namely, the participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women (see E/CN.6/2018/4). The Vice-Chairs of the Commission, Rena Tasuja (Estonia) and Mauricio Carabali Baquero (Colombia), chaired the interactive dialogues.

2. As part of the review, the following 13 Member States presented information, on a voluntary basis, on trends and challenges faced and actions and initiatives undertaken to address the challenges faced by women and girls in the media and the digital age: Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Germany, Kenya, New Zealand, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Sri Lanka and the Sudan. The presentations were followed by responses and comments from Member States and others that had partnered with those mentioned above. Those partners, respectively, included Paraguay, Brazil and Mexico, the International Organization of la Francophonie, Tunisia and Denmark, Italy and Armenia, Norway and Mexico, El Salvador, Morocco and Panama, Namibia and China, Rwanda and South Africa, Australia, Canada, Lebanon, and Samoa, Morocco and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Bahrain and Singapore, the Netherlands and Brazil, Nepal and Indonesia, and Morocco, Ethiopia, El Salvador and Panama.

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3. The Director of the Intergovernmental Support Division of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Christine Brautigam, presented the report of the Secretary-General on the review theme, which drew on inputs from 34 Member States and other information. The report identified measures to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and their human rights in the digital age, including by enhancing policy coherence and aligning the implementation of national sustainable development, information and communications technology (ICT) and gender equality strategies, action plans and resource allocation; improving girls' and women's access to and use of ICT to close the gender digital divide; and strengthening the evidence base.

4. All presenting countries acknowledged that the digital age had and continued to rapidly transform many aspects of economic, social and political life. That included the creation of content, access to and dissemination of information, and ways of working and interacting, with broad implications for education and learning, access to services such as health care, forms of work and employment in fields such as commerce and finance. In many of the presenting countries, the integration of gender perspectives in national ICT strategies and policies, including many e-government initiatives, provided a solid basis for action to enhance opportunities and actively respond to challenges that women and girls encountered in the digital age.

5. At the same time, the digital age and the widespread use of ICT, including online media, also posed challenges relating to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and negative social norms and created new threats to girls' and women's safety and privacy. Those could range from cyberviolence, sexual harassment and intimidation to portrayals of women and girls that perpetuated gender inequalities, including with respect to physical attributes, roles and expectations, professions and activities.

6. Several of the presenting countries highlighted the persistence or even widening of a gender digital divide, reflected in the lower rate of enrolment and retention of girls and women, compared with boys and men, in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics and in computer science education in particular. A similar trend was observed in the media sector, where women journalists remained often vastly outnumbered by men journalists and the representation of women in top positions, including as editors, had declined, sometimes dramatically. In Belgium, that had been demonstrated through studies and research and, as a consequence, a journalists' association had developed a tool called "Expertalia" to facilitate the diversification of sources that favoured equality and diversity.

7. Countries reported on their efforts to address online gender stereotypes and digital harm. The "Because I Say No" campaign in Slovakia was aimed at increasing awareness about sexual violence, but had also resulted in a decrease in the public's tolerance of sexual violence and improved women's capacity to respond to such violence. New Zealand had conducted a study on the gendered nature of digital harm, which had shed light on young people's online lives. The gender-specific findings had clearly demonstrated the need to empower young people through education and awareness-raising on how to be safe online and by involving young women in particular in developing digital tools.

8. To address gender stereotypes, Germany had launched its "Discover Football" initiative, aimed at promoting diversity and successes of women athletes to counter the association of sports with men and enhance the popularity of sports among women and girls. Argentina and Costa Rica reported on the use of legal and regulatory frameworks to address digital harm, including information laws, regulations and national observatories to prevent and monitor symbolic violence, hate speech and harassment in the media. Kenya had used hack technology to tackle gender-based

violence, including to map such violence, gather data and provide survivors with access to essential information and support.

9. Many presentations demonstrated how ICT technologies had broadened economic opportunities and access to services, with particular achievements for women, including those living in rural areas and women with disabilities. The "E-Wallet" agricultural scheme in Nigeria had enabled women to gain direct access to agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and agrochemicals without middlemen, affording them larger profit margins. The Gezira family medicine project in the Sudan had provided accessible and affordable primary health care in rural areas, where medical facilities used ICTs for online interaction between medical personnel to overcome geographical barriers, including through medical display devices, webcams and telemedicine software. The success of the M-Pesa mobile money platform of Kenya had provided financial access to millions of women and girls who had been left out of the traditional banking sector. A total of 9 out of 10 Kenyans now accessed financial services through M-Pesa. In Costa Rica, local radio stations in remote locations had helped to increase awareness among women and girls in the rural areas of their rights. Colombia had promoted the access, use and ownership of ICTs among women with disabilities and women caregivers. Argentina had placed emphasis on the inclusion of women in its digital transformation, to enhance their participation in the economy and entrepreneurship, and in accessing markets.

10. Policies, strategies and specific programmes had been aimed at improving women's and girls' participation in ICT and their information technology (IT) literacy. Sri Lanka, for example, had reported sustained improvements in IT literacy among women and girls as a result of the implementation of the "e-Sri Lanka" programme. A key component was to increase the empowerment of women and young people through increased and affordable access to ICT tools and multilingual Internet materials. A component of the ICT strategy of Saudi Arabia was to encourage the entry of girls and women into the ICT sector by providing scholarships and incentives such as subsidized social security for employers to hire women ICT specialists. The digital citizenship programme in Colombia focused on, among other areas, digital literacy, communications, trade, security and law and had demonstrated beneficial impacts for women and girls. Bulgaria's programme to enhance the participation of women in the digital sector was aimed at enhancing work-life balance by combining training, skills upgrades and digital literacy with measures to support women's careers in the ICT field through child-care services and other types of support. Nigeria had in place a number of applications and awards, including the GEM-TECH awards, to draw women into the ICT field.

11. A number of presentations demonstrated ways to increase the representation of women in the media. In Germany, efforts towards achieving gender balance in the media and ICT sectors included the use of quotas. Belgium and Slovakia used rosters and databases of women with expertise in different fields, including in journalism, ICT and banking, as an important resource for employers to broaden pools of candidates, as well as for advocacy to achieve greater representation and expand networks of advocates and experts.

12. Presenters agreed that comprehensive partnerships among government, civil society organizations, the media and the private sector, including public-private partnerships, were a key strategy for enhancing women's and girls' access to and use of ICT. In Costa Rica, public-private partnerships had enabled the expansion of government programmes to encourage the participation of young women in ICT fields through formal and non-formal education. Such partnerships had helped to expand broadband availability in rural and remote areas and had enabled better access to online information, for example for women farmers.